

# – PARADIGM SHIFTS IN SOCIAL HOUSING AFTER WELFARE-STATE TRANSFORMATION: Learning from the German Experience

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## Abstract

*Welfare-state transformation and entrepreneurial urban politics in Western welfare states since the late 1970s have yielded converging trends in the transformation of the dominant Fordist paradigm of social housing in terms of its societal function and institutional and spatial form. In this article I draw from a comparative case study on two cities in Germany to show that the resulting new paradigm is simultaneously shaped by the idiosyncrasies of the country's national housing regime and local housing policies. While German governments have successively limited the societal function of social housing as a legitimate instrument only for addressing exceptional housing crises, local policies on providing and organizing social housing within this framework display significant variation. However, planning and design principles dominating the spatial forms of social housing have been congruent. They may be interpreted as both an expression of the marginalization of social housing within the restructured welfare housing regime and a tool of its implementation according to the logics of entrepreneurial urban politics.*

## Whatever happened to social housing?

Social housing during the 'golden age of welfare states' (Pierson, 1991: 121) between 1945 and the early 1970s can be viewed not only as the most important but also as the most visible instrument of Western welfare-state housing policy. Subsidized, administered and in some states built by public authorities, it left bold footprints on urban housing markets and the spatial structure of cities. Though industrialized housing in modernist urban and architectural typologies was not used exclusively for social housing, nor was it the only spatial form it assumed (see Urban, 2012; Whitehead, 2012), it became its dominant representation in architectural history and in the mind of the general public (see e.g. Lampugnani, 2011). It provided the material precondition and aesthetic vision of Fordist mass housing, aiming to provide 'good-quality housing widely available to the population' (Swenarton *et al.*, 2015).

Since the early 1980s, however, this 'Fordist paradigm' of social housing has been restructured in Western welfare states (see Whitehead, 2012; Czischke and Bortel, 2018). From early on in the discussions, researchers from different countries have proclaimed the 'end of social housing'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, they rightly expected that cutbacks in social housing would have a profound effect on housing provision for lower- and middle-income groups. But this wise prediction obscured the fact that social housing did not come to an end. Instead, it was adjusted to function within the logics of post-Fordist welfare and entrepreneurial urban regimes. In consequence, the hegemonial Fordist paradigm of providing quality 'housing for all' dissolved.

Comparative housing research has identified trends in national housing policy that converge on the redefinition of social housing as a residual segment within the

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1 See, for example, the summary of a volume of studies on social housing in different states from 1988 in Häußermann (1988: 287).

housing market for ‘vulnerable households and special groups’ (Rosenfeld, 2015: 27; see also Whitehead, 2012: 220), suggesting that a new paradigm of social housing may have emerged. However, little attention has so far been given to the fact that the termination of national housing policies in many states deliberately opened up opportunities for the emergence of significant local variations in the provision and spatial organization of social housing (see Hoekstra, 2013). As a result, local conditions and especially local urban policies are now playing an important role in structuring social housing. A grasp of the new paradigm of social housing thus requires not only contextualizing social housing within national housing policies, but also understanding and explaining its differing local manifestations.

Based on these thoughts, in this article I aim to explain the new paradigm of social housing that has superseded its Fordist predecessor in Germany. I begin by referring to international trends in welfare-regime transformation, and the restructuring of housing policy and urban development, to explore how the particularities of national housing policy and local urban and planning policies have affected social housing (and its transformation) in Germany. In the second part I reconstruct the dominant paradigm of social housing that has emerged, on the basis of an empirical analysis and a comparison of social housing in two major cities in Germany—Frankfurt/Main and Munich. I also explore the extent to which there is leeway for local variation within the paradigm.

My analysis is based on an interdisciplinary approach to the paradigm of social housing that integrates three dimensions: ‘social housing’, as understood by housing researchers, mainly denotes a policy instrument that is used to provide publicly funded housing for groups in need, mostly defined by income criteria (Czischke and Bortel, 2018). In this respect it has a societal function as an instrument for intervening in the housing market and ensuring accessibility to housing for a specific section of the population defined by the state. This societal function necessarily requires state regulation of production and distribution of social housing, and thus comes in institutional forms regulated by the state to secure its implementation. Finally, subsidizing housing necessarily materializes such housing into spatial form—in other words, into houses built at sites that have been set aside for social housing. Of course, the spatial form of social housing determines the quality of housing built through state funding.

### **From housing for all to housing the few: shifting paradigms of social housing in Western welfare states and cities**

Since the mid-nineteenth century in industrializing capitalist states, housing as simultaneously a genuinely and naturally restricted scarce good and a basic need has been a contentious issue. Housing provision through the market has always remained precarious, especially for lower- and middle-income groups. From the early twentieth century, evolving welfare states—reacting to social unrest and trying to pacify social conflicts on the one hand without taking housing as a means of capitalization of urban land off the market on the other—have sought strategies to at least partially solve ‘the housing question’ (cf. the first two chapters in Harloe, 1995). These welfare-state housing policies reached their peak during the ‘golden age of welfare states’ (Pierson, 1991: 121) between 1945 and the early 1970s (see also Whitehead, 2012).

According to welfare state theory, welfare states provide a mode for socializing the intrinsic conflict between capitalism and democratic legitimation that is necessary for avoiding social upheaval and its disruptive effects on capitalist societies (see Lessenich, 2016). However, constellations of conflicts, actors and balances of power vary historically and between states. This results not only in ‘varieties of capitalism’ (see Hall and Soskice, 2001), representing different ways of organizing industrial relations, but also in different ‘worlds of welfare states’, namely, in varying modes for socializing the contradictions of capitalism through nationally specific welfare-state regimes

(see Esping-Andersen, 2012; Schröder, 2013). This also applies to housing. As Esping-Andersen states (2012: 356), welfare regimes can be differentiated by the degree of decommodification, the system of regulation, and the extent to which states intervene in markets and society to provide welfare services. While housing is considered to be the ‘wobbly pillar’ of (Western) welfare states (see Torgersen, 1987; Matznetter and Mundt, 2012) as it has been taken off the market to a very limited degree only, social housing represents an instrument of strong and direct state market intervention. But the role and scope of social housing within national welfare housing regimes—such as its societal function—differ widely in terms of the proportion of social housing, the population that is eligible, and the institutional forms applied, i.e. in terms of the policies, instruments and actors providing social housing. Liberal welfare states (such as United States, the United Kingdom and Australia) tended to provide social housing only in cases of emergency for marginalized sections of society, resulting in what is called a ‘dual’ housing market. Social housing within those housing markets was well known to be a residual housing segment that offered only low housing quality and was strictly segregated from the regular housing market. In contrast, ‘conservative’ and ‘social democratic’ welfare states in Europe (such as Germany and France, or Sweden and the Netherlands after 1945) developed a unitary housing market that included large segments of social housing for a broad range of the population and was widely competitive in terms of housing quality within the entire market (Kemeny, 1995: 58 *et seq.*). But the objectives and strategies used in these states differed widely (Whitehead, 2012), the German case being distinctive in many respects.

- The temporary nature of social housing in postwar West Germany  
 Social housing in (West) Germany was shaped significantly by the country’s postwar conditions and its (political) positioning in relation to the neighbouring socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR). As a result of war destruction and an influx of refugees, West Germany faced a lack of housing after 1945 that affected the entire population: it is estimated that there was a shortage of 5 to 6 million housing units in 1950 (Wagner-Kyora, 2005: 840). While generally hesitant about state intervention in the housing market, West German politicians proclaimed a ‘controlled housing economy’ for the time being (*ibid.*: 889). This legitimized far-reaching state activities that included rent control, housing distribution and immense state funding of housing construction that was to compensate for the lack of private money for investment (*ibid.*: 842). However, the objective was not to establish a permanently decommodified housing segment owned by state or municipalities. Instead, German national policy deliberately avoided housing policies that might have resembled socialist GDR state housing. Social housing was thus mainly produced through subsidized loans that were granted to private and public developers (see Droste and Knorr-Siedow, 2014). In return, subsidized units were to be let only at rents set by social housing law and reserved for residents eligible according to social-housing income levels. These were meant to include the ‘broad population’. In fact, new units were often unaffordable for low-income households, who tended to live in substandard inner-city housing at the time, where rents were kept low by means of rent capping. Furthermore, restrictions in terms of rent and eligibility to become residents of social housing ended after a period that was regulated by contract (15 to 30 years). After that time, owners had full legal control over the units built with state social housing funds and could let them at market rates. Therefore, social housing in Germany was the ‘social interim use’ of state-funded real-estate capital by (private and public) owners (Donner, 2000: 200). Not only the housing stock but also social housing as an instrument of housing policy in general were of a temporary nature: in terms of the ordoliberal concept of Germany’s ‘social market economy’ and the conservative-corporatist welfare regime, state intervention in any market sector was to be restricted

to situations of market dysfunction or to ensure social stability. Applied to social housing, this meant that direct state intervention in the housing market was legitimate as long as housing scarcity imposed pressure, and the lack of (private) capital after the second world war necessitated state aid to provide housing for large parts of society (Wagner-Kyora, 2005). As early as the 1960s, housing policy shifted towards more market-oriented instruments, such as individual housing subsidies from 1963, and increasingly focused on individual home ownership (*ibid.*).

The German case shows very clearly that social housing was the product of very particular historical conditions and political constellations that were nationally specific; nevertheless, it represents the heyday of social housing, which had been the result of housing shortages, economic growth and the Fordist organization of welfare-state regimes (Harloe, 1995: 211 *et seq.*)—regimes that were oriented towards increasing private consumption of mass-produced goods and wealth, and towards providing for certainty and social security. However, making quality housing available to a large proportion of the population also necessitated acceptance and even more support for the industrialized mass production of houses. This approach was accompanied by a broad cultural hegemony of modernist architectural aesthetics: large-scale housing estates organized according to the principles of (late) modernist urban planning, constructed with pre-fabricated components, and managed by large companies. While these architectures are often referred to as exposing the shortcomings of social housing today, they originally represented a social vision (Lampugnani, 2011): the idea of distributing the benefits of growth and prosperity and guaranteeing housing for all at prices affordable to everyone. Modernist planning and building typologies ('towers in the park') were neither a housing typology reserved for the poor, nor were they the only typology that was used to provide social housing (Urban, 2012). But they became—for good or ill—the spatial form with which Fordist housing policies were and still are widely associated by the public and architectural historians in many Western welfare states, thus representing the social-housing paradigm of the time (Häußermann, 1988; Lampugnani, 2011; Urban, 2012).

- Post-Fordist welfare-state restructuring, entrepreneurial urban politics, and the transformation of social housing

The heyday of Fordist social housing lasted only for a relatively short historical period between 1945 and 1975 (Harloe, 1995: 10). From the 1970s onwards, social housing and its paradigm were substantially affected by the restructuring of welfare states that succeeded the crisis of Fordism. The processes involved in this restructuring followed pathways that differed from country to country, but from the perspective of comparative housing research two decisive lines of transformation have been identified. First, market-oriented strategies for providing affordable housing (such as housing vouchers) gained momentum, and the de commodified segment within the housing market was marginalized (Harloe, 1995; Whitehead, 2012). From the early 1970s the number of existing and new social housing units dropped in all Western welfare states. Social housing in many states was reshaped into a segment for people with special needs, or as a means of coping with housing emergencies (Rosenfeld, 2015). Within the European Union (EU) this was enforced through EU competition law (Czischke, 2017). In general, social-housing regimes tended to emulate the model of the liberal welfare state. Secondly, responsibility for the provision of housing was decentralized and delegated from national to subnational and finally local levels (Brenner, 2004; Andreotti *et al.*, 2012: 1926). As a result of this state rescaling, responsibility for housing policy also shifted towards local entities (Scanlon and Whitehead, 2014).

This commodification and rescaling of housing policy had profound effects on the spatial development of cities as national funding and institutional support for social housing diminished. These effects coincided with a period of intense urban development,

sometimes framed as ‘urban renaissance’ or ‘urban regeneration’ (see Urban, 2018), but redevelopment and upgrading strategies for (inner-)city neighbourhoods, brown- and greyfield sites (harbours, and industrial or logistics sites) or modernist social housing estates mostly neglected strategies for integrating social housing, or integrated it to a negligible extent only. Instead, the focus was on middle-class interests, on the creative, financial and service industries, and increased urban land value, which resulted in gentrification. Researchers who adopt the perspective of political economy have interpreted this as the result of entrepreneurial urban politics that focused on locational competition for investments, increasing tax incomes, and the reduction of costs so as to cope with shrinking public budgets brought about by post-Fordist national (welfare-)state restructuring itself (see e.g. Harvey, 1989; Heeg and Rosol, 2007; see also Peck, 2012). There can be no doubt that local entrepreneurial approaches to urban development led to reductions in social housing stock. Nevertheless, given the increase in local leeway in defining housing policy, it can also be inferred that different local social housing strategies emerged in terms of spatial location, organization and provision. The paradigm of social housing that emerged thus resulted from a complex interplay between nationally induced transformation of social housing and local policies for urban development and housing. Consequently, it includes a broad range of local variations.

– Social housing as crisis strategy in Germany

Social housing (and urban policies) in Germany followed the general trajectories described above (see Whitehead, 2012; Czischke and Bortel, 2018). In the course of this process, GDR housing too was forced into the logics of the West German social market housing economy and the dynamics of its restructuring after the countries’ ‘reunification’. However, this was not a continuous process, and in 1990 the dynamics of commodification and rescaling were ‘interrupted’: in the early 1990s the influx of migrants from Eastern Europe and the deficient housing stock in the former GDR caused a temporary increase in funding for social housing.

In West Germany, this transformation had already begun in the 1970s, when subsidies for new social housing units were reduced. On the one hand these reductions were the result of a general rise in scepticism about social housing. In the political discourse, on the other hand, they were also legitimized as a reaction to mismanagement within the social housing sector, cost explosions and a resulting surplus of social housing units, bluntly labelled the ‘social housing heap’ (Harlander, 2008: 825). The relatively expensive social housing units built during the late 1960s and 1970s had lost their appeal for the middle classes. As wealth in general increased and housing preferences changed, they opted instead for (suburban) homeownership and upgraded inner-city housing instead of large social housing estates on the outskirts of cities. For those belonging to the lower-income groups, however, the new social housing units remained too expensive (*ibid.*: 834, 838, 848).

The conservative administration led by Chancellor Helmut Kohl from 1982 onwards directed its efforts towards a withdrawal from welfare-state intervention in the housing market in general (Harlander, 2005). Based on a governmental expert commission’s report in 1984, the government officially proclaimed the housing market to be balanced. According to Germany’s social market economy, social housing as state intervention in the market had thus lost its legitimation; national subsidies for social housing were downsized dramatically from 1.4 billion German marks (1982) to 450 million German marks (1986) (*ibid.*: 693). Nevertheless, in line with the idea of the social housing market economy, cyclical housing shortages led to temporary increases in social housing funding at the national level. At the same time, existing social housing units were predictably lost to a large extent through the termination of the interim use of the postwar housing stock as social housing. The number of social housing units in Germany



dropped continuously, from 2.87 million in 1990 to 1.24 million in 2016 (Janson, 2018), and the number of new units being subsidized and built dropped accordingly: in 2014, this figure stood at 9,874 units per year for the entire country (Spars, 2017: 86).

This loss of decommodified housing was further exacerbated by the restructuring of the German housing economy, which took different forms in West and East Germany: from 1990 onwards, the nonprofit housing sector<sup>2</sup> in West Germany was practically dismantled by abolishing tax exemptions (Kuhnert and Leps, 2017); this led to a commodification of the former social housing stock and large-scale privatization of former nonprofit companies, including many that had formerly been owned by public entities. In addition, players following a nonprofit logic disappeared from the arena of housing policy and markets, with the exception of the remaining member-based cooperatives, smaller religious organizations and alternative institutions.

Simultaneously, privatization and commodification of housing occurred within the former GDR territory, although this process began differently. In 1989, 41% of GDR housing was state-owned. Through unification contracts state-owned housing was transferred to municipal housing companies, or cooperatives. Moreover (accompanied by heavy protests), debts were attached to the (local) stock that the GDR government had originally granted as subsidies (Borst, 1997: 127). Thus, East German housing companies were heavily indebted from the outset. To intensify the national government's efforts to privatize the large amount of municipal and cooperative housing, from 1993 onwards it offered debt relief in exchange for the promise to privatize at least 15% of all units (*ibid.*: 130). Thus, in East and West Germany, formerly state-owned housing and nonprofit stocks were to a great extent commodified, although this took place via different mechanisms.

While the institutional form and availability of social housing had already been restructured, in 2001 the national government also changed the legal definition of the societal function of social housing (through the Wohnraumförderungsgesetz, or Housing Promotion Act). This law shifted the function of social housing from providing housing to the broad population to low-income households and groups with special needs (the elderly, pregnant women, the disabled). Finally, in line with the post-Fordist trend towards decentralization of governance, national social housing policy was ended in 2006; the national government handed responsibility for social housing to the federal states and, in fact, eventually devolved it to the local level (through the Föderalismusreformgesetz, or Federalism Reform Act).

It was only from 2012 that the process of continuous withdrawal was interrupted. From 2008 onwards, a new 'housing crisis' arose, exacerbated by the global finance and real-estate crisis. From 2012 national government addressed this crisis through changes in national housing policy, including an increase in social housing subsidies. Without doubt, this started a new cycle of housing policy at the national and in many cases also at the local level (Schönig *et al.*, 2017: 50 *et seq.*) The post-Fordist paradigm of social housing established between the 1970s and 2012 is analysed in more detail in the next section of this article.

The transformation of social housing I described here did not come without spatial and aesthetic materialization of housing—indeed, researchers have even stated that the transformation of social housing as an instrument of housing policy was paralleled, even supported, by the postmodernist cultural and aesthetic criticism of modernist social housing typologies that gained traction from the early 1980s. In many

2 Until 1990, nonprofit housing in West Germany was regulated by a specific law that exempted all nonprofit housing companies from corporation taxes, property taxes and business taxes. In spite of this terminology, the housing companies regulated by law were allowed to earn a small profit, which was to be reinvested in housing. However, they were obliged to let their housing stock at cost-covering rental prices. The nonprofit sector in Germany included cooperatives, companies owned by the (national and federal) state, municipalities and privately owned company housing or housing owned by civil-society actors or churches. These owned 30% of all rental housing units and 58% of all social housing units in 1983 (Harlander, 2005: 701).

countries, though not everywhere,<sup>3</sup> the shortcomings of segregated large modernist social housing estates were exploited as an argument against social housing in general. However, by that time, architects, planners and the housing companies themselves had already started to experiment with new forms of social housing that differed markedly from Fordist mass-industrialized housing (Urban, 2018). In Germany, these efforts gained ground at the institutional level at the documenta urbana in 1982, an experimental housing development originally meant as an urban and architectural complement to the documenta exhibition in Kassel (a 100-day exhibition of contemporary art showcased over the entire city, held every five years); the social housing structures proposed here allowed for individuality, self-build strategies and community building (Lepik and Strobl, 2019). On a larger scale, the 1987 International Building Exhibition (IBA) in Berlin powerfully promoted new social housing (see Gleiniger-Neumann, 1985) by focusing on urban and architectural contextuality, mixed use and social mix. In addition, the IBA advocated affordable housing in the existing inner-city urban housing stock and citizen participation. In general, top-down planning and industrialized mass housing seemed to have come to an end. Interestingly, the dominant force that was financing and thus enforcing this change in urban design policies was still the welfare state, which subsidized strategies of careful urban renewal and inner-city social housing development (Urban, 2018).

### **Form and function of post-welfare-state social housing in Germany—and its variations**

In sum, welfare-state transformation can be seen as having coincided with the restructuring of urban policy and postmodern criticism of modernist planning and housing. From this, a new post-Fordist paradigm of social housing emerged in terms of societal function, and institutional and spatial form. Internationally, converging trends of welfare-state transformation and urban policy led to similar trends in restructuring social housing. However, in Germany this process was crucially structured by the specificities of a social market housing economy, the effects of the unification of the GDR and the German Federal Republic, and a comparatively radical dismissal of modernist urban and architectural models that were regarded as the spatial manifestation of ‘social housing’. To identify the characteristics of the paradigm in more detail, I conducted an empirical analysis and comparison of social housing in two German cities, which I present in the next section. My research aimed at describing the extent to which evidence of local variations and leeway in the implementation of social housing transformation could be found.

- Case-study cities and case-study period: the entrepreneurial cities of Frankfurt/Main and Munich from the 1980s to early 2010s

The transformation of the paradigm started in Germany from roughly the early 1980s and reached its political completion with the formal withdrawal of the national state from social housing in 2006. After 2012, a new political cycle of housing policy at the national level started, which in 2019 even led to a general reinsertion into the constitution of the possibility of intervention in social housing policy at the national level. Therefore, my study of social housing focused on the period from 1980 and 2012, i.e. the moment before the new cycle of housing policy started. This makes it possible to examine the shift towards a new post-Fordist paradigm of social housing that currently might already be in a renewed state of transformation. This time frame is also appropriate because it is compatible with the shift from Fordist to neoliberal entrepreneurial urban policies (Peck and Whiteside, 2016: 22). It also roughly matches

3 An interesting counter-example is Austria. Here, modernism as a leading principle of housing development was never met with the rejection it experienced in many other Western welfare states (see Urban, 2018; Zupan, 2018).

the institutionalization of postmodernist architectural and planning principles, as described above.

To draw valid conclusions concerning the characteristics of a potential new paradigm of social housing and identify the local leeway it would allow, case studies were selected that involve widely differing concepts for providing social housing: Munich and Frankfurt, two cities that despite their differing population are comparable in many respects, but have repeatedly been mentioned as having followed different approaches to local housing policy over the specified period.

Both cities are considered metropolises within Germany; they form the core of a larger metropolitan area, have similar economic conditions, and tense housing markets. Since the early 1980s, both have been characterized by strong economic momentum, but also by cyclical shortages in affordable housing (BBSR, 2012: 14, 76). Both cities' populations shrank in the 1980s, but began to grow again steadily from the early 2000s onwards. Today both have significantly exceeded their former peaks since 1945 (Frankfurt's population grew from 688,730 in 1963 to 747,848 in 2018, Munich's from 1,338,924 in 1972 to 1,542,211 in 2018) (see LH München, 2018; Stadt Frankfurt, 2000: 8; 2019: 1, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, n.d.). However, the cities' political environments differ. Munich was dominated by the Social Democrats from 1984 to 2014 (in coalition with the Green Party from 1990 onwards). Frankfurt, by contrast, after a long period of conservative majority, was governed briefly by a Social Democrat–Green coalition between 1989 and 1997, followed by an all-parties alliance in its local parliament, led by a very strongly conservative mayor (Petra Roth). Nevertheless, urban researchers have identified equally strong 'entrepreneurial' urban development strategies in both cities from the 1980s (Breckner and Schmals, 1993: 94; Ronneberger, 1995: 295, 317–18; Sträter, 2012: 362; Schipper, 2013: 376).

Housing markets in both cities have continuously remained tight, with the exception of a few short periods. As a result of rising land and rent prices, housing provision for lower and middle-income groups in particular has constantly been precarious, despite a great deal of new housing construction, which took place mainly in the high-end segment (BBSR, 2013: 16). In total, the number of subsidized housing units in both cities sank over the period examined (BBSR, 2012: 28, 58). At first glance, the strategies the cities employed to deal with their perpetual housing shortages and social housing construction seem quite different. Within current discourse, Munich has been characterized by strong, long-lasting municipal commitment to social housing policy (*ibid.*: 22, 56). Since the early 1990s, the city has been following a social housing construction strategy that integrates urban development policy and housing policy through the use of planning instruments and significant obligations for investors. By contrast, the production of new social housing units was of less relevance to urban housing policy in Frankfurt. At the same time, Frankfurt's social housing stock was significantly reduced (Heeg and Holm, 2012: 217–19). For these reasons, Munich and Frankfurt provide opportunity for comparative analysis, as they represent two very different settings in which the national transformation of social housing was implemented.

- Research approach: operationalizing form and function of social housing in the case studies

In this section I discuss my application of the methods of sociological hermeneutics to reconstruct the new paradigm of social housing through an empirical analysis and comparison of social housing in Frankfurt and Munich between 1980 and 2012. This was undertaken by studying the way societal function and institutional and built form of social housing were structured in the two cities during those years.

The three dimensions have been subdivided into tangible characteristics, which (as Table 1 shows) were assigned indicators that can be regarded as variables



**TABLE 1** Social housing paradigm research matrix

Category	Characteristic	Indicator
Societal function	Target group	Income, age, marital status, special characteristics (e.g. disabilities, teenage mothers, religion)
	Market segment	Proportion of total housing stock, prices
Institutional form	Production	Developer (public, private, civil society, profit/nonprofit), financing, funding programme, planning instruments
	Organization	Provider (public, private, civil society, profit/nonprofit), tenure (i.e. rent, housing cooperative, ownership), allocation and occupancy practices, duration
Spatial form	Integration into the city fabric	Spatial distribution of social housing in the city, neighbourhoods, and individual buildings
	Architecture and urban design	Urban design, housing and building typologies, interior amenities, outdoors spaces, and amenities
	Provision of infrastructure	Provision and quality of nearby infrastructure (social infrastructure, local supplies, recreation/culture, transport connection)

SOURCE: Author's research

involved in the transformation. To describe the societal function of social housing, target groups and the role of social housing within the housing market are informative, as they demonstrate the range of the population to be provided with housing, and the relevance of social housing within an urban housing market. The institutional forms encompass the institutional arrangements used to produce and organize social housing. These arrangements provide information on the means the states used to steer the social housing stock, the extent to which stock was removed from the market, and the extent to which production, service provision and administration was entrusted to state agencies, market forces, nonprofit actors or even to residents themselves. Finally, the analysis of spatial forms examines the characteristics that are necessary for ensuring quality living and integration of inhabitants into the city and the way in which they might be stigmatized as a result of living in social housing. It also includes analysing the location and spatial distribution of social housing in the city, the availability of diverse infrastructures and services, its integration into neighbourhoods and buildings (in terms of urban and architectural design), and the quality of the housing stock itself and of the surrounding outdoor spaces.

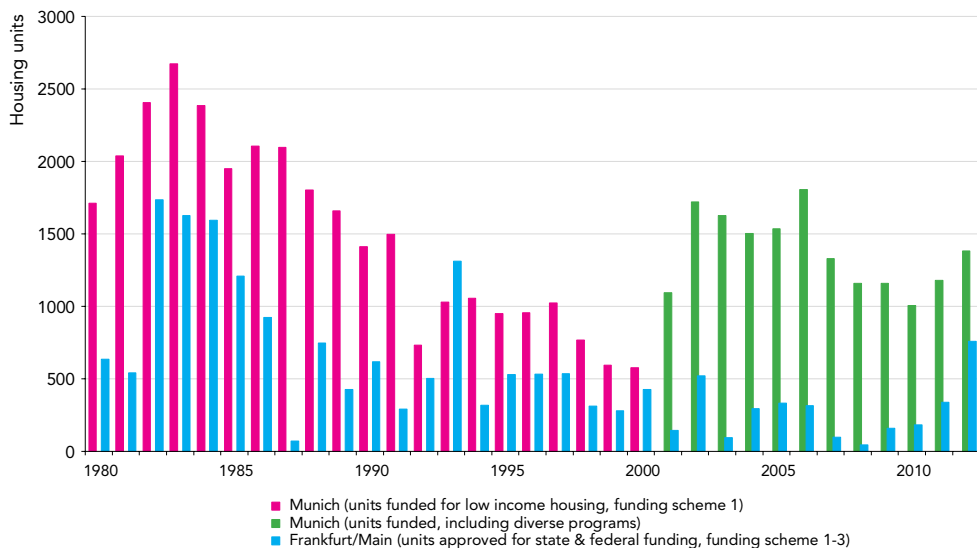
In my investigation of social housing in the two case-study cities I used methods of empirical social research. These included a study of city-wide policies and the urban development of social housing construction, and the collection and interpretation of quantitative municipal data about social housing construction. In addition, a total of 14 structured expert interviews were conducted with representatives of housing associations, and with housing researchers, high-level public employees and political actors from the urban planning department. I also carried out an extensive literature and document analysis. For the period studied, subsidized housing projects were recorded according to number, funding, urban development criteria, location and provider. Out of the projects identified, I selected 22 for a more detailed analysis (13 in Munich and nine in Frankfurt). These projects were analysed comprehensively on the basis of the research matrix, which included on-site visits, cartographic analysis and literature analysis.

Data collection on social housing was difficult: quantitative data on social housing construction in both cities was only partially comparable because of the differing modes of collecting data and/or subsidizing housing, and the differing meaning of figures (for example, subsidies granted, building permits granted, or units built). Moreover, the data the cities collected and the types of subsidized housing changed over the period studied. All numerical data mentioned here refers to social housing for lowest-income

groups, called 1. Förderweg (1st Funding Scheme) until 2000, which thereafter included different types of social housing for lower-income groups.<sup>4</sup>

- The societal function of social housing in Frankfurt and Munich: similar but different

In terms of the societal function of social housing, it could be expected that the decreased importance of social housing construction as a housing policy instrument at the federal level would be directly reflected in local strategies and policies. Indeed, from the 1980s onwards, a significant reduction in newly constructed or approved social housing units for the lowest income groups is discernible in both cities. However, this decline was interrupted by surges in national funding in reaction to assumed temporary market dysfunction. Serious shortages of (affordable) housing arose in many metropolitan areas in Germany at the beginning of the 1980s and 1990s. In the early 1980s these were caused by inner-city upgrading and speculation, as well as by substantial increases in rent in newly built social housing. By the 1990s the ‘housing question’ was once again regarded as urgent: continued upscaling of inner-city housing, the noticeable reduction of new and existing social housing and an increase in urban populations as a result of migration from the states of the former GDR and from Eastern Europe had contributed to a serious lack of affordable housing (Harlander, 2005: 707). Both situations led to short-term increases in permits for newly constructed units in Frankfurt and Munich. Nevertheless, significant local variation can be seen in the graph (Schönig, 2018: 235) (see Figure 1). In general, development of new social units in Frankfurt fluctuated more strongly and remained marginal after 2000, whereas it increased significantly in Munich.



**FIGURE 1** Social housing in Frankfurt and Munich by housing units (sources: data retrieved from LH München, Referat für Stadtplanung und Bauordnung, and Stadt Frankfurt, Bürgeramt, Statistik und Wahlen, based on data from the Hessisches Statistisches Landesamt up to 2001, Landestreuhandstelle Hessen and Referat für Stadtplanung, 2001–2012, graph created by Carsten Praum)

4 In accordance with the new law on provision of housing, subsidies were specified according to group and income level and adapted per city based on the different policies of the various federal states and varying local housing policies.

In both cities the general reduction in social housing units affected residents from the lowest-income groups most. From as early as the 1980s, both cities' housing policies were oriented towards the middle classes. To maintain the cities' tax income and avoid supposedly 'socially deprived' social housing complexes, federal programmes were often combined with local programmes for middle-class housing (LH München, 2012: *Anlage*; Evers and Harlander, 1983: 150). The shrinking volume of subsidized housing was only partially reserved for low-income groups.<sup>5</sup> In combination with privatization and the lapse of social restrictions on older social housing units, this caused a devastating, far-reaching reduction in available housing for low-income groups: in 1978, social housing accounted for 20.6% of all housing units in Frankfurt. In 1993 this figure stood at 19.3%, while by 2012, only 8.9% remained (there were 62,069 units in 1993, and only 32,454 in 2012). In Munich, this decrease is even more clearly visible: while in 1980 social housing's share of total housing units accounted for 19.7% (approximately 112,000 units), this figure had dropped to 14.7% (97,787 units) by 1993, and to 5.9% (approximately 45,000) in 2012. In the 1990s, however, within the housing stock of municipal housing companies, Munich established social rents that were equal to social housing rents. If we include these units, housing for the lowest income groups accounted for 11.1% of all housing units in the city—although these units did not count as social housing in (national) legal terms.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of housing market share and its role in housing provision, the marginalization of social housing at the federal level is clearly reflected at the local level in Munich and Frankfurt. This marginalization coincided with urban development policies that, already in the 1980s, had paid little attention to housing for lowest-income groups and made 'economic arguments about economic constraints' (Evers and Harlander, 1983: 148) the premise of social policies. In the course of these processes, social housing has become an exceptional segment of the housing market—legitimate as an instrument of housing policy only in cases of individual housing crisis. However, differences between the number of new social housing units approved and the development of the share of low-income housing within the general housing market indicate that there were nevertheless differences in local strategies.

– The institutional form of social housing: local leeway for variation

The redefinition of the function of social housing was accompanied by a restructuring of the institutional form, i.e. the way in which social housing was produced and organized. This was done differently in Munich and Frankfurt. Even in the 1980s both cities had reacted to the predicted transformation of social housing construction on a national level by establishing their own housing policy concepts, instruments and municipal programmes for subsidizing social housing (see Evers and Harlander, 1983: 129). In the light of tight municipal budgets, both cities sought legal planning strategies that would help them cope with an expected decrease in national funding for social housing in the long run.

Munich focused on housing policy programmes, strong municipal housing companies and the legal regulation of land and planning processes involving what was called 'socially just land use' in the Federal Building Code (*Baugesetzbuch*).<sup>7</sup> From 1989 onwards, the city imposed an added-value planning levy (*Planungsmehrwertabschöpfung*) for the construction of social infrastructure, and from the mid-1990s it linked approval of zoning plans for housing with the integration

5 In addition, federal programmes were put in place that were meant to support only middle-income groups and were to be set aside as social housing for these groups for a very short period (five to ten years, known as the 2./3. Förderweg, or 2nd/3rd Funding Scheme).

6 Data were calculated based on the following sources: Frankfurt/Main: Evers and Harlander (1982, Part D: 504), Stadt Frankfurt (1992), Stadt Frankfurt (2017: 50); Munich: Evers and Harlander (1982, Part B: 164), LH München (1994: 26–28; 2012: 164); data on total housing units were based on Statista (2020a; 2020b).

7 See Federal Building Code (*Baugesetzbuch*), section 1, paragraph 5.

of subsidized housing. While these measures were imposed on private investors, it was mainly the municipal companies who provided social housing. After 1990, when tax exemptions for nonprofit organizations were abolished, the municipal companies' share of new social housing units increased to 43% (1990–2000) (up from 22% in the 1980s), and to 49% between 2001 and 2012, according to data retrieved by the city. Moreover, city and municipal housing associations agreed to permanently assign former social housing units to the lowest-income groups that had originally been subsidized, and to retain social rent price limits to make these units affordable (LH München, 2012: 165 *et seq.*). Furthermore, the city established a round table for housing governance to integrate private housing companies into general housing policies, as one planning official stated in an interview. To ensure continuity of information, adjustment of policies and continuous evaluation of measures, the city committed to developing housing plans regularly. So far this has happened every five years.

As might be inferred from the differences in social housing stock development from 1990 onwards, Frankfurt did not develop comparable institutional arrangements. In the 1980s, the city of Frankfurt focused on small-scale projects for different target groups, often financed through local programmes. In the 1990s, similar strategies, such as an added-value planning levy and a set percentage of social housing construction were discussed (Buchholz and Hausmann, 1998: 22). However, in light of municipal budget deficits and the discursive hegemony of entrepreneurial strategies in urban development, these measures were not implemented (Ronneberger, 1995: 298 *et seq.*; Bartholomäi, 1998; Buchholz and Hausmann, 1998). Informal or formal obligations to compensate for the loss of social housing existed only to a limited degree: from 1999, the 'Frankfurt contract' enforced occupancy controls after termination of legal social housing status (Stadt Frankfurt, 2005: 10). However, the municipal housing association deliberately focused on high-quality housing and on upgrading its housing stock to finance redevelopment and end the stigmatization of its housing stock. In Frankfurt, a notably high number of small housing cooperatives and civil-society actors engaged in subsidized housing projects. However, subsidized housing included housing for lowest-income groups to a limited extent only (Stadt Frankfurt, 2012: 82–83). Thus it seems that the discontinuation of the legal nonprofit housing sector and the resulting reorientation of company policies in the municipal housing association (Schipper, 2018: 90–1) in Frankfurt had very different effects from those in Munich.

Clearly the institutional social housing arrangements were transformed in both cities. However, efforts to intervene in local housing markets through legal planning instruments and by deliberately steering municipal housing companies with regard to the supply of social housing varied significantly. This might be explained multi-causally in terms of specific local policies and actors, but also as a result of the conditions for urban development, housing provision and the housing market at the turning point of housing policy around 1990—a policy that was marked by the abolition of nonprofit housing companies' tax exemption. While this aspect cannot be discussed in detail in this article, Munich undoubtedly benefited from a long-term and stable urban government coalition (dominated by Social Democrats) that took a strong interest in developing local housing policies, supported by a strong planning administration and guided by powerful heads of planning (Christiane Thalgott, 1992–2007, followed by Elisabeth Merk, who is still in office at the time of writing). Social Democratic mayors Georg Kronawitter (1984–1992) and Christian Ude (1992–2012) and the head of the planning department were in office for more than a decade, and substantially shaped the understanding of post-transformation local housing policy after 1990. As one interviewee put it, social housing policy in Munich was supported by the traditional Munich spirit of local politics and economy to 'take care of local workforces' across party lines. Within the housing policy arena local housing companies were naturally considered to be part of municipal housing policy—in spite of the necessity for this

policy to be restructured according to national laws. In contrast to other federal states in Germany, the conservative government of Bavaria had supported social housing throughout these years (also in the Social Democratic state capital of Munich).

Frankfurt was characterized by similar political conditions in the early 1990s: local government was dominated by the Social Democrats, supported by the Green Party. As in Munich, the planning administration and its head (Martin Wentz, 1989–2001) supported the use of planning instruments to build new social housing. But conditions in general were less supportive of social housing policy: from the mid-1990s onwards, the city was under serious fiscal pressure and began orienting itself towards intensifying entrepreneurial strategies. From 1995 a rather inconsistent ‘all-party coalition’ ruled the city, and from 1995 until 2012 a strong conservative mayor, Petra Roth, shaped urban development projects. In addition, the state government of Hesse, even though dominated until 2003 by Social Democrats, did not support social housing to the extent that the government of Bavaria did. According to one interviewee, from the 1990s onwards Frankfurt ‘followed its reputation’ and continued to expand its leading position as a city for office building, not housing construction. In doing so, the city focused on increasing the value of inner-city urban land. In general, the dominant urban development policies generated within that political environment focused on investment, office-block development and inner-city redevelopment. Several large urban projects were put in place by the city’s conservative mayor. But another aspect was of major importance and had a long-lasting effect: the restructuring of the municipal housing company differed crucially from that in Munich. While the city of Frankfurt continued to hold the majority of shares in the housing company, the political focus shifted to redeveloping existing housing and diversifying the housing portfolio through investment in profitable housing, and thus generating revenue, not least for the city itself.

Frankfurt’s entrepreneurial strategies had an immediate and a long-term impact on housing: it created institutional path dependencies, which even massive social movements and current reforms are having trouble turning around today (see Schipper, 2018: 89). Munich, by contrast—despite its growth-oriented housing and urban-development policy since the 1980s (Evers and Harlander, 1983; Breckner and Schmals, 1993)—through institutional change retained institutions and developed instruments within the new national framework to provide a long-term, stable municipal housing and land policy. Today, it can claim not only to have the power to react to land and rent price dynamics but it can also build on the fact that regulation within the urban housing market and the claim for tradeoffs for the city are accepted—by both private and public investors. The municipal housing companies are the most important actors in this process in terms of providing and producing social housing. The administrative planning department makes use of planning law, informal strategies and urban development to guarantee this, and private investors contribute to this at least partially, whenever zoning rights are created.

– The spatial form of social housing: urban, diverse, invisible

While in terms of institutional form significant differences can be found that also play a role with regard to the societal function of social housing, spatial forms are very similar in both cities. In parallel with general trends in Germany, the profound spatial restructuring of social housing in both cities gained momentum from the 1980s onwards. However, this transformation did not result in one specific urban or architectural form of social housing. Instead, principles of spatial form can be identified that clearly distinguish social housing from this period from preceding periods. This is true for infill projects in the inner city and existing housing estates, as well as for new neighbourhoods and suburbs, and applies to both cities.

Owing to the lack of land within city borders and decreases in funding, in the 1980s housing was mainly built in the form of small-scale infill, or by completing



larger estates. From the 1990s, when military changes, logistics and infrastructure left large grey- and brownfield sites within or at the edge of cities, large-scale housing developments regained momentum. These were developed according to differing urban typologies, and differing urban and architectural styles. Based on the general idea of 'contextual urban design', postmodernist urban quarters with blocks, squares and small-scale streets, as well as modernist urban structures with rows, smaller towers or slabs can be found that often match the surrounding area. In most neighbourhoods an attempt was made to create high-quality public spaces, 'urban' density (see Wentz, 1998; Stracke, 2011: 180), and a mix of uses and residential groups (see Mohr and Hunscher, 1995; Düwel, 2001; LH München, 2012). The goal was to avoid monofunctional and socially homogeneous neighbourhoods that were regarded as a problem of Fordist social housing settlements.

One prerequisite for this approach was the integration of a wide spectrum of housing options and typologies to attract a wide variety of income groups and social groups (i.e. families, single-person households, couples without children, seniors, and those with disabilities). To ensure diversity, different institutional providers were extensively involved in the development of larger neighbourhoods, and different forms of tenure were offered.

While this might be conceptually convincing in general, it also immediately led to a reduction of social housing in general. Ultimately, over the course of the three decades studied, the proportion of social housing regarded as appropriate in new developments was gradually reduced in both cities. During the 1980s, between 60% and 80% of social housing was regarded as socially viable in both cities. Interestingly, both cities also experimented with social mixing strategies by implementing 100% subsidized developments in existing higher-priced neighbourhoods. From the 1990s onwards, however, the share of social housing in new developments gradually sank to its current level of merely 30% of subsidized housing for various target groups. As mentioned earlier, in Munich this figure had already been enforced in the 1990s through 'socially just land use'. In Frankfurt, a similar regulation was not implemented in this period, but only in 2014, in view of the latest housing crises (Schipper, 2018).

Despite the objective of creating socially mixed neighbourhoods, social housing within neighbourhoods is frequently clustered and segregated from market-rate and affordable housing for the middle classes. It can be found in the least attractive locations: in the most densely built areas or on the fringes of neighbourhoods, where emissions (for example, traffic emissions) are higher and land prices are therefore lower. Overall, there were very few projects in which freely financed and subsidized apartments, and thus a variety of income groups, were combined in a single building. Although technically possible, this involves a high level of administrative effort on the part of housing companies (Stadt Frankfurt, 2012: 76). However, despite differences in terms of fittings and building materials, it remains hard to recognize social housing from the outside, as it is deliberately designed to adapt to its surrounding neighbourhood to avoid stigmatization of inhabitants and loss of value of the neighbouring market-rate housing. Most projects since the 1980s include quality open and green spaces that are clearly designated as private, semi-private, public or common spaces by means of barriers or by their design.

Although projects clearly differ in terms of design quality and locational aspects, provision and accessibility of infrastructures, such as local supply, social institutions and public transportation, urban planning sought to avoid the problems that characterized the peripheral, badly equipped and poorly connected social housing estates built in the 1970s. These aspects are also a prerequisite for the marketing of non-subsidized apartments built by both public and private developers. Frequently, social institutions and local supply (i.e. daily-needs retail) were integrated into buildings of publicly owned housing companies.

In sum, two main points can be made with regard to the spatial form of social housing. First, local typologies of social housing could not be identified. But in line with local contextual urban design and architecture, variations between individual projects could be found. Generally speaking, great importance was placed on concept, diversified green and public spaces, infrastructure facilities, and architectural and urban design quality.

Secondly, comparisons between the two municipalities yielded a comparable guiding principle for social housing construction for the study period, which can be summarized as ‘urban, diverse and invisible’. In line with hegemonial postmodern urban design and architectural guiding principles, the focus was on creating urban spaces in terms of density, public and open spaces, mixed use and diversity of income and social groups, the share of social housing decreasing gradually and becoming invisible—in terms of architecture but also in terms of quantity.

### **Conclusion: Social housing for the fortunate few—a paradigm with variation**

As the case studies show, the transformation of social housing in Germany has led to a new paradigm in terms of the societal function, and the institutional and spatial forms of social housing. To differentiate this paradigm from its Fordist predecessor, ‘housing for all’, it could be framed as ‘housing for the fortunate few’. Social housing has been transformed into an exceptional segment within the housing market that is to be used only in situations of housing crisis, whether for individual housing emergencies or general housing shortages. This new paradigm has evolved through the complex interplay of three processes of transformation: the transformation of social housing policy at the national level, the enforcement of entrepreneurial urban development policies at the local level, and a shift in the guiding principles for planning and urban design.

As I showed in this article, the German case mirrors trends towards the residualization of social housing, which have been observed in all Western welfare states with regard to the societal function of social housing. What is remarkable about the German case, however, is the historic continuity that underlies the logic of social housing as an exceptional segment. The dominating ordoliberal concept of social market economy in West Germany since 1945 reduced state intervention to situations of serious market failure. From early on it therefore legitimated social housing only as a provisional housing policy strategy designed to produce apartments that were to be withdrawn from the market as social housing only temporarily. Once the postwar housing crisis was deemed to have been solved, housing policy in the 1960s commenced to withdraw from ‘social housing for all’ and eased into transforming it into an exceptional segment within the increasingly liberalized housing and welfare regime (see Schönig *et al.*, 2017). The dynamics of this transformation and the effects thereof on housing provision have nevertheless increased dramatically over the past three decades as they have been reinforced through local entrepreneurial urban politics and coincided with the (cultural) dismissal of the modernist built form that generally characterized social housing in Germany.

However, although social housing has become increasingly marginal within the German housing market and limited to specific groups only, its residualization has not resulted in a dual housing market in which social housing significantly differs from market-rate housing in terms of quality and general location. Instead, the social-housing projects I examined in my case studies in Frankfurt and Munich, which had been designed according to the principles of contextualism, provide quality urban design and architecture, infrastructure and spatial integration. Indeed, it seems that spatial quality, invisibility and quantitative marginalization—being ‘urban, diverse, and invisible’—appear to perfectly match the logics of neoliberal urban development housing policy and social market economy housing policy. Social housing that is almost indistinguishable from market-rate housing will be easily marketable once it loses its

temporary status as social housing. Because the social housing market is small and projects are aesthetically integrated, social housing can also be assumed to not disturb the (long-term) marketability of surrounding urban spaces and real estate. Consequently, the dominance of contextualism in urban design and architecture in social housing projects in both cities studied, and their resemblance to market-rate housing prove to be more than the mere outcome of the hegemony of postmodernist aesthetic preferences: the guiding spatial principle of social housing—‘urban, diverse, invisible’—can be interpreted as an expression of its newly defined societal function as ‘social housing for the fortunate few’ and as a tool for its implementation.

However, while contextualism in both cities dominates the spatial form of social housing, its institutional form and consequently its societal function, too, are significantly shaped through local actors, urban policies and conditions. Indeed, as a result of decentralization of national housing policies, local variation in terms of institutional form and societal function of social housing is fixed in the dominant paradigm and can be said to be one of its essential characteristics. As can be seen in the case of Munich, this local leeway can result in enlarging the scope of the societal function of social housing and in the use of a broader range of planning and legal instruments to promote social housing. More generally, it can also open the door for social struggles to enforce social housing policies at the local level, and for interventions in housing markets through local planning and regulation—an opportunity that many German cities are currently using in which various postneoliberal practices at the local level are being put into practice and claimed by social movements (see e.g. Vogelpohl and Buchholz, 2017; Schipper, 2018; Vollmer and Kadi, 2018). An interesting subject for further research might be the extent to which the delineation of function, form and local variation of the new social housing paradigm indicates the general line of a newly established international paradigm of social housing, or whether it should be interpreted as yet another specificity of the German housing regime.

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